

## What is it?

EC (also called emergency contraception pills) is a special dose of birth control pills that prevents pregnancy after you have had unprotected sex. Some people call EC the “morning after pill,” but you actually have up to 5 days (120 hours) after sex to use EC.

## How EC Works

EC works the same way as regular birth control pills do, except that it is a stronger dose. Just like birth control pills, EC prevents pregnancy. EC is not an abortion pill.

## Your Personal Back Up Plan

EC can help prevent pregnancy if you were having sex and:

- You didn’t use any birth control
- A condom broke or slipped off
- Your partner didn’t pull out in time
- You missed 2 or more of your regular birth control pills
- You are more than 1 week late for your Depo shot
- You were forced to have sex

“My boyfriend didn’t pull out in time. I heard about EC from a friend, so I called the hotline and found a clinic. The rest was easy. I just showed up, filled out a form, and got my pills. It was a huge relief to get EC, because I wasn’t ready to be pregnant again.”

— Dawnelle,  
age 26, bank teller,  
mother of two

## How to Get EC

It’s important to get EC **as soon as possible** after having unprotected sex! Here are some ways you can get it:

- Call your clinic or health provider
- Walk into any public health clinic — you don’t need to make an appointment!
- Call the EC Hotline, 1-888-NOT-2-LATE (that’s 1-888-668-2528) day or night.

And here are some things to keep in mind:

- Tell the clinic you need **emergency contraception**.
- Know the start date of your last menstrual period, and also the date(s) that you had unprotected sex.
- You do **not** need a physical exam to get EC!

**FACT: EC is most effective if you take it within the first 24 hours after unprotected sex.**

## How to Use EC

Most clinics and pharmacies have 2 different kinds of EC: progestin only pills (brand name **Plan B**) and combined estrogen/progestin pills (brand name **Preven**). Both types have 2 doses of pills.

- Take the first dose within **5 days** after having unprotected sex (the **sooner** the better).
- Take the second dose exactly 12 hours after the first dose.

If you do not get your period within 3 weeks after taking EC, or if your period is very light, call the clinic!

### New option for Plan B users:

If you are worried that you will forget to take your second dose of Plan B, you can talk to the clinic or pharmacy about taking it **at the same time** as the first dose. There is good evidence that taking both doses of Plan B at once is just as effective as taking them 12 hours apart.

## What to Expect: Common Side Effects

EC is very safe. The most common side effect is nausea (feeling sick to your stomach), but this side effect only lasts about a day. Some other temporary side effects are:

- breast tenderness
- changes in the timing of your next period (it often comes earlier or later than usual)
- changes in the flow of your next period (it can be lighter or heavier than usual)

## How To Avoid Feeling Sick to Your Stomach!

- Ask for **Plan B**, the progestin only EC. It causes less nausea than combined estrogen/progestin EC.
- Try to eat some food, like bread or crackers, about 30 minutes before taking your EC.
- Try taking Dramamine or Benadryl (medicines that prevent nausea), about 1 to 2 hours before taking EC. These medicines can make you sleepy, so don’t drive right away!

**TIP: If you throw up within 2 hours of taking EC, call the clinic or pharmacy. You will need to repeat the dose.**

## Effectiveness

EC is safe and effective at reducing your risk of getting pregnant. Progestin only pills (**Plan B**) are newer and more effective - they reduce your risk of pregnancy by **89%**. Combined estrogen/progestin pills (**Preven**) reduce your risk of pregnancy by **75%**. The message? EC gives you a second chance, and **EC Works!**

## Benefits of EC

Emergency contraception gives women a safe and reliable back-up plan for preventing pregnancy. Here are a few of the reasons why women choose to use EC:

- Can prevent pregnancy when taken up to 5 days (120 hours) after unprotected sex
- No long-lasting side effects
- Safe for almost all women (even women who can’t take estrogen)
- You can keep EC “on hand”, just in case you need it

## Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

EC has very few disadvantages! But it’s important you know that:

- EC is less effective than a **regular** birth control method like the Pill, Depo, or condoms.
- If EC **doesn’t** work and you become pregnant, there may be an increased risk that the pregnancy will be ectopic (in your fallopian tubes).
- EC does not protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STDs). You need to use a condom if you think you need protection.

## Tell your friends

EC is a safe, reliable way to prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex. It is also the only way a woman can protect herself from pregnancy after she’s been raped. But too many women still do not know about EC. So, spread the word, and **tell your friends**.

**FACT: Every woman should know about EC.**

# How to Use Regular Birth Control Pills as EC

The easiest way to take EC is to use the packaged EC pills available at your clinic or pharmacy. However, if you are unable to get EC from a clinic or pharmacy, you can take special doses of your **own** birth control pills for emergency contraception.

Taking your own birth control pills as EC is just as effective as taking the packaged EC pills. But most women notice more side effects (like throwing up) when they use their own birth control pills as EC.

Using the chart below, find the **brand name** of your birth control pills and follow the chart across to find out what pills to take. If you don't have any of the birth control pills listed on this chart, call your clinic or health provider.

Brand Name	Pills to Take Now	Pills to Take 12 Hours Later
Nordette Levlen Lo-Ovral	4 pills <b>now</b>	4 pills <b>12 hours later</b>
Triphasil Tri-Levlen	4 yellow pills <b>now</b>	4 yellow pills <b>12 hours later</b>
Ovral (Preven)	2 pills <b>now</b>	2 pills <b>12 hours later</b>
Ovrette One of the 'mini-pills'	20 pills <b>now</b>	20 pills <b>12 hours later</b>

**Note:** When using your own birth control pills for emergency contraception, you **must** follow the chart exactly as it is written. **Do not** swallow more pills than this chart lists. More pills will increase your risk of throwing up!

# Common Questions

**How many times can I use EC?**  
You can use EC as often as you need. It will be just as effective no matter how many times you use it. But EC is not as effective as an **regular** method of birth control. If you find that you need to use EC a lot, it is probably time to talk to your clinic or health provider. They can help you choose a birth control method that works best for you.

**When can I start using regular birth control?**  
Right away! You can start using regular birth control methods like Depo or condoms the same day that you start EC. Other methods, like the Pill, can be started the next day.

**If EC doesn't work and I become pregnant, could it hurt the fetus?**  
No. There is no medical evidence that EC pills would harm a developing fetus. EC is not an abortion pill. It simply won't work if you are already pregnant.

**Is there a way to keep EC at home, just in case I need it?**  
Yes! Every woman should have EC pills on hand, just in case. You can ask your health provider or clinic for a supply to keep at home. In Washington State, you can go directly to some pharmacies and they will prescribe EC for you. To find a provider or pharmacy near you, Call 1-888-NOT-2-LATE (that's 1-888-668-2528).

**REMEMBER:** Only a regular form of birth control, like the Pill, Depo, or condoms provides the kind of day-to-day protection that most women want!

# To learn more about other reversible birth control methods:

- Check out our brochures on:**
- The Pill
  - Depo Provera ("The Shot")
  - Condoms
  - IUD
  - The Patch
  - The Ring

**Check out our website at:**  
[www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan](http://www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan)

# To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline  
1-800-770-4334 **OR** TTY 1-800-848-5429  
For confidential information and referrals

# To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:  
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)  
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:  
**[www.not-2-late.com](http://www.not-2-late.com)** to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.



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